

EU and Western Balkan states (WB6) – Montenegro

August 26, 2020, Siget 18 C, 10000 Zagreb, Croatia

17:00 **Welcome and Introduction**

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17.05 **„Keynote Speaker “**

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17.10 **Discussion**

Discussion

Norbert Beckmann-Dierkes PhD

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Siniša Vuković, PhD

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Holger Haibach

Ladies and gentlemen on behalf of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation I would like to welcome you to the 3rd episode of the series EU and the West Balkans 6, which we are conducting together with our trusted friends from the Hybrid Warfare Research Institute. I would like to very much welcome our friend Dr Gordon Akrap, the director of the institute. We have already had two very successful episodes on the enlargement process of the European Union, Croatia and the neighbourhood. Today we are going to talk to about Montenegro. Although being the smallest state in the region with just a little over 600.000 inhabitants, Montenegro poses a special case. It is for one a NATO member and the second point, it is the only entity outside of the European Union that has actually introduced the German Mark and after that the euro as a consequence. So it is in the interest of Europe, as we already underlined in the previous meetings that we had, and especially in the interest of Germany that right now holds the presidency of the European Union, to keep the countries of the West Balkans as close as possible and to give them an option to become members of the European Union. Obviously if all the conditions are fulfilled, they finally can become members of the European Union. This has also been something that has been thriving the Croatian presidency, that has just ended one and a half month ago, and we are very happy to have a lot of very distinguished experts to talk about the case of Montenegro and what it means for the reaching. But first of all I would like to hand over the word to Gordan Akrap.

Gordan Akrap

Thank you, Holger. Montenegro is a very interesting case, not just for us – Croatia – but also for entire Europe, as well as for Montenegro. Now the elections are coming up in Montenegro. So

the question arises will it be possible to change the government that has ruled Montenegro for the last 30 years and will there be changes in the political scene, which might be of importance for other activities in the region. Let me just give you a brief introduction into the topic, and then we can invite our guests for discussion. I would also like to welcome all of you who have joined us. Please ask questions whenever you feel to. I have to excuse Prof. Lakičević-Đuranović because she could not join us due to family reasons.

The area of Southeast Europe, which includes the countries colloquially named WB6 states, has been the source of numerous crises, conflicts and wars for centuries. Consequences of those insecurities have gone beyond the realm of the area itself. Numerous, substantially different, interests of local, regional and global powers confronted each other in this area, hindering the normal development of societies and states even at times when other parts of Europe were at peace. Conflicts and wars, non-acceptance of compromises and agreements, have become such a recognizable way of resolving open issues and differences. That is why the term “Balkanization” has been introduced into the official political language, describing the violent process of disintegration of multi-ethnic political communities (such as K&K, Ottoman Empire, SFR Yugoslavia). Numerous national, social, ethnic and religious issues remain open and unresolved. They continue to be a significant burden for WB6 societies and states and a problem for their positive development.

Montenegro is in complex situation with numerous conflicts and divisions. A state that has undergone a political transformation from a guarantor of the Yugoslavia to a state that was seeking its own political independence; a state that was secondary target of NATO operations in 1999, and now a full member of NATO; a state that participated in the aggression against Croatia and with which it is today firmly connected (despite several open issues) and

which (Croatia) helps Montenegro on the way to the EU as we helped on its way to NATO membership.

Montenegro is, and this has been evident for many years, a deeply divided society. Such a society can hardly build a political and social community and state institutions, which can, and should be, effective in fulfilling the fundamental interests of the individuals and communities that can build up functional society and state. The impossibility to function as it should be, or the slow development of the state, creates dissatisfaction among those who are actively trying to build a state as well as among those who oppose it because they think that state is developing in the wrong direction. Political elites fail to reach agreement on any significant issue, while nationalist, national, civic and religious issues are constantly in conflict at the intellectual and public scene. There is no unity in the issue of the political identity of Montenegro that would be acceptable to the people in Montenegro. The differences in the process of Montenegro's accession to the EU as well as in the already existing membership in the NATO alliance are especially important. In Montenegro, there is no consensus on many issues on which the sustainable future of the state can and should be based.

There are 520,026 persons on the voters list who will decide about the composition of the future parliament of Montenegro. Montenegrins presents 45% of the total population of Montenegro, which is a consequence of numerous migrations and policies in the twentieth century, especially during the existence of Yugoslavia. Candidates from 11 candidate lists have been registered for the elections. Given the results of the pre-election polls, the possibility of repeating the scenario where, as in Croatia, representatives of national minorities cast their votes as key votes for the formation of government, is realistic. The processes taking place in minority communities about the emergence of two

different lists of national minorities (among Croats and Albanians) are visible. It is also evident that the political parties that oppose the independence of Montenegro and which are under the influence of Serbia (11 of them), gathered in one candidate list in order to prevent the unwanted waste of their own electorate. They clearly showed their political idea by the fact that they are the only list that uses Cyrillic as their official alphabet. The internal social and political division of Montenegro and the strong external influences are also visible in the analysis of these lists.

We are witnesses that this year Montenegro was faced with intensive problems related to the adoption of the Law on Freedom of Religion, which took numerous supporters of the Serbian Orthodox Church to street protests. This topic, in addition to the usual topic of corruption and crime of state structures, is one of the leading ones in this year's election campaign. This is a clear indication that the issue of identity is still one of the essential determinants of any process of national independence. Namely, Montenegrins are in the process of their re-identification as a nation. In this context, they lack one of the key determinants that adorn the Orthodox world: the autocephalous church. Due to historical circumstances, the former autocephalous Montenegrin Orthodox Church was abolished in 1918 with the creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Its re-institution, especially in the light of the recognition of the autocephaly of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, is an almost impossible mission. The process determined by the law has led to a number of serious security challenges for Montenegro and deepened the divisions. The Serbian Orthodox Church was very often the source of numerous aggressive and war-inciting attitudes during the Homeland War. For Catholics, this issue may not be so important, but in the Orthodox world, the issue of the autocephalous church is one of the important identity issues (take the example of Macedonia and Bulgaria and the Orthodox churches there, as well

as the Serbian Orthodox Church's attitude towards the Macedonian Orthodox Church).

These issues, as well as some others that I have not mentioned here (political, economic, financial, security influences of Russia, China, Turkey) make Montenegro by my opinion vulnerable. This vulnerability is particularly reflected in the pre-election period when various actors are involved in the electoral process in order to encourage change/maintain the status quo in Montenegro.

Free, multi-party elections in which citizens, by their own free will, elect their representatives are the key to the survival of any democratic society. Democratic elections are a very sensitive process that can be influenced, either positively or negatively, at the political and organizational level. Therefore, they need to be protected. Strong interference in Montenegro's internal affairs that are coming from outside of Montenegro, justified by the struggle in order to protect their own interests (national, political, religious, economic, financial), shows that democracy remains very sensitive and vulnerable to the kind of challenges it faces.

Therefore, in electoral processes, it is necessary to pursue policies that build, not dismantle, create and not destroy, merge and do not divide. Why, after almost three decades, can we still not witness the emergence of statesmen in WB6 countries who would be like Vaclav Havel in the former Czech Republic who enabled the peaceful disintegration of the country? Who would actively work to combat and punish any form of hatred and prevent violence; who would pursue a peaceful, constructive policy in which dialogue is more important than monologue; in which it is more important to listen and hear than to unnecessarily emphasize its alleged power and strength and use it as a possible threat to solve open issues; which will not threaten but call for cooperation? Who can be and would be a statesman and not just a simple politician?

Is there a minimum level of values and points of interest around which the ruling party and the opposition can gather to create the conditions for effectively facing the many challenges that the young Montenegrin state has? What are the possible points and topics, what are the processes that need to happen for these goals to begin to be met, what are the people who have the strength to work for the long-term benefit of the population as opposed to short-term interests? We know that we are asking a lot, but if these issues are not opened and they are not discussed openly and without hesitation, Montenegro, like any other country and society in a similar situation, will only stagnate and regress. That position can cause serious negative consequences for all stakeholders of the political scene because at some point it will become an irrelevant issue of national and religious affiliation if the population can not meet their basic living needs.

This is my introduction. I am very glad that I had the chance to share my ideas about the situation in Montenegro and how it reflects to the countries in the region. As you said, it is a fact that Montenegro is a small country by the number of its citizens, but it is very significant because of the position and because of the influence it has in this region.

Holger Haibach

Thank you very much Gordan. I think you are perfectly right in emphasizing that Montenegro, as all countries in the region not only the West Balkan 6. The same goes also for Croatia to certain extend also for Slovenia – these are multi ethnic countries. The idea of creating an ethnically clean country doesn't really work. Because you have ethnic minorities everywhere, and they play an important role. This is also due to the fact of the rich history this region had. You had people coming and getting out, you had

empires coming and getting out. As history is complex, the future might be as complex, as well. However, that it is the task of our generation of the politicians of today to find the right solutions. At this point I would like to ask our guests to join in. I would like to start with a very good friend of mine with whom I shared a lot of very deep and interesting discussions with. Dr Norbert Beckmann. At the moment he is overseeing our activities as the KAS director for Serbia and Montenegro and he is an intermediate for Northern Macedonia and Kosovo. He has been around the block more than a few times, he knows the region – I think in KAS-terms and from a German point of view you can call him Mr Balkan, as he has the richest experience among us, who have been in this region. Norbert, could you share with us your present outlook regarding Montenegro.

Norbert Beckmann

Holger thank you so much! Gordan, congratulations. Yes, I am dealing with countries from the Western Balkans and it is a very good idea, especially in the case that Germany has now the presidency over the European Council. And it is absolutely necessary in my own opinion that we focus our interest much more on this and to underline that these are all European countries. So it is the same if we are talking about Northern Macedonia, Montenegro or Serbia or the others. So we have to get in mind by other stakeholders that we are dealing not with outside of Europe, no, we are dealing with deeply European countries in cultural sense, in economic sense and in political sense.

Thank you for the flowers, Holger – you called me Mr Balkans I think there some are others who have earned that title much more than I do, but it is true. I like that region and I am very, very happy that I have this chance to travel a lot before

these Corona times, to meet a lot of people and to get them my own impressions on different issues.

So, now we are dealing with Montenegro. I would like to remind you that every introduction about Montenegro starts with 'it is a small country...' with let's say 620.000 Montenegrans. All people there live in Montenegro. And what is of special interest is this short story after Montenegro left former Yugoslavia and the entire construction in 2006. In this political sphere they developed a lot of things in the last eleven years. So about the political constellation and I think it started as follows: Montenegro has made great efforts since its independence 2006, but in the political sphere the discussion topics have remained more or less the same. I think we can underline that. So, now in 2017, 11 years after the referendum, Montenegro or Crna Gora joins the NATO. In 2020, on the 30th of June Montenegro opened the last chapter of the acquis, Chapter 8 – competition. So there were all the steps forward in the political life and they are really active to become a lively country and to say, yes, we are ... if you remember this meeting with the President of the United States and the moment he meets the Prime Minister of Montenegro and everybody knows it in this moment where is Montenegro and who was this guy who was beaten by the US-President, which was not so unimportant for the visibility of Montenegro. In the following years after the referendum on which it regained the independence Montenegro is expecting parliamentary elections, so on that Sunday where they dealt much with the similar issues as it has been in 2006. The majority of the opposition parties as were openly supporting Russian interests while a small number of the opposition were dreaming of a reunification again, with Serbia. Additionally, the status of Kosovo and membership in NATO are still topics which politicians on both sides used to sway the voters.

The government coalition consisting of the Democratic Party of Socialists, Social Democrats and Bosnian, Croatian Albanian minority parties have had a united stand on this issue since 2006. In my analysis the DPS SNSD has utilised the status as the protectors of statehood and sovereignty in every elections since then. On the other hand, DF, it is the strongest party coalition in the opposition and the most pro-Serbian and a little bit pro-Russian utilizing their own status as protectors of the Serbs and of the unification with Serbia. And then - all other economic infrastructure, and other local or regional issues, is still the most equivalent factor in the campaign. If there is to be a shift in the constellation of the government coalition, then the electoral results of the URA party, the Democrats and the Social Democratic party are to be closely monitored. As the surprisingly good results of the democrats could bring about a change in power as the most probably SNP DF and possibly URA to form a new block in the power.

This is, however, a much less probable option as it would not be to gain the support of minority parties. This is the first time I think and it is really interesting what happens in the elections in Montenegro we will see on Sunday in the evening. Now the last part: two weeks ago and there was no majority for the ruling coalition. The good results of the SDP, a party that was in the government for 17 years and has recently been playing with the idea of renewal of the partnership with the DPS could refresh the ruling coalition and at the most critical stands.

A word about the URA. URA has rejected this possibility as a party. There are no practical reasons for this party not to negotiate with the DPS. Then we are following the campaign you have seen as Gordan mentioned as one of the most interesting topics throughout this discussion about this law-dealing with the churches. How to organize it. It becomes a little bit slower at the

end. If I ask some of the observers they more or less mentioned that now at the end of the campaign it is a little bit – in brackets – boring that there is no real big struggle and it is also a question how many people will be joining this elections, which will be interesting and have a strong impact on the results on Sunday.

Without question it is really important – I shall repeat it - to have Montenegro in our minds and not to see it only as a small country within the borders of Europe, so it is not important and the like, especially with this special relation to Serbia and its special relation to Russia, in different terms. Not to forget the change in politics – how to deal with the ethnic minorities. This becomes more and more interesting to see how it will organize the enlargement process of the European Union. This is so important for the whole development of this region. First so much to this. Thank you so much, and I am very interested in our discussion after this short opening remarks. Thank you.

Holger Haibach

Thank you very much Norbert! I think you very nicely echoed Germany's commitment to the countries of the Western Balkans seeing them as European countries, and also having their interest at heart because we know they are neighbours and the Should become members of the European family because they are European countries. And you also lined out all the different influences as they are - multi ethnic, multi religious influences from the outside. All these things are going on in a very small country, but nonetheless a very important country. For that I am very happy to welcome Dr. Siniša Vuković from the Johns Hopkins University. Dr Vuković we are very happy to have you with us from the other side of the Atlantic; visits going back-and-forth have become slightly more difficult because of the Corona situation, but it made us a little bit more innovative, as far as the way how

we are communicating is concerned. Thanks for your availability. Perhaps you might give us a little more from afar view on how you see the situation of Montenegro and West Balkans 6.

Siniša Vuković

1. Introduction

It is generally a pleasure to exchange ideas and discuss the ongoing situation in the country that I come from. I live as you were saying in Washington DC, I am a professor at the Johns Hopkins University, and I deal with conflicts. I run the conflict management programme for the school of advanced International studies. I have a keen interest in understanding the social dynamics that shape societies on the go. Montenegro has a very special place in my analysis and listening to your opening remarks kind of gave me a good segue to what I wanted to start with. I would like to begin by saying that there is nothing extraordinarily unique about Montenegro compared to the rest of the Western Balkans. Allow me a small remark: Montenegro is not the first one and the only one to introduce the euro. Maybe not many know – Montenegro introduced its Deutsche Mark policy in November 1999 while Kosovo was the first one to introduce the possibility to legalise multiple currencies in September of 1999 according to the decision of UNMIK. So at this moment Kosovo and Montenegro are the only two countries outside of the euro zone that use the euro. But this type of approach about Montenegro trying to find something unique has made Montenegro being discussed in terms of how we should really conceptualise the processes as in Montenegro. The main process that is being essentially in Montenegro is the existence of deeply rooted social cleavages. So if I may, social cleavages as expressed as they are in Montenegro, should not be treated as an unbearable burden or an obstacle on the path of further democratic consolidation. This is something that I really want to

stress. In fact the essence of democracy is to embrace these differences of opinion to encourage critical thinking to allow for a norm to be contested, and most importantly to embrace that social value and social evolution can only be achieved by contrasting competing ideas and visions in the society. The last thing that Montenegro needs right now and in the future is anyone to suggest or advise that the only way forward for a young and fragile democratic system is to undo all those social cleavages, to reconcile and pacify artificially, and that all of these social cleavages have been emerging in a way that require this abrupt reconciliation within the society.

That path in my opinion and by observing all conflicts around the world is a path of disaster that can only result in a totalitarian mindset, authoritarian practices and for Montenegro most visibly and notably populist demagogy. No advanced democracy like Germany, Italy, the United States where I live, Spain, France, the UK anyone that we want to emulate, no advanced democracy has ever allowed to silence competing ideas about the past, the present and the future in their societies. No advanced democracy is void of social cleavages. Societies that foster a sense of urgency to prematurely silence these differences and construct this artificial social reconciliation should not be a model to follow. And a few come to mind; you know from the most extreme in North Korea to the most recent one says Turkey, Russia, Brazil etc. Social cleavages as such in Montenegro are not a problem per se. The essential challenge in trying to conceptualise the problem in Montenegro on a political level, the essential challenge for Montenegro's political maturity is the creation of a fundamental democratic principle as an undisputable social value. What I am talking about is the principle of compromise. Compromise as a foundation of any democratic society. Historically Montenegro in particular, but also I can say the Western Balkans in more general, have achieved most if not all of their milestones through

revolutions, rebellions, warfare or insurrections. The end game in those processes was always valued if it resonated through 0-sum lenses. And we have seen that now echoing through this overview of high political landscape is right now Montenegro. This uncompromising unyielding political zest. As such, throughout the history that has always been the need to clearly define who is the winner, who is the loser, to winner the spoils. That was the mindset, that has been the mindset. Well, there is nothing unusual about this practice, don't get me wrong. I do not say that this should be eliminated.

The lack of institutional development over time throughout the centuries throughout the past decade, over the course of social development in Montenegro it was greatly defined by this 0-sum approach. There should always be red lines – don't get me wrong, there should always be red lines for any type of compromise in certain types of social values and principles should not be gambled with. Or used as bargaining chips. But every day routine politics - this is what we are talking about today - routine politics was unfortunately void of any resemblance to compromise reliance of persuasion instead of coercion, concession making versus unilateral impositions of solutions. This practice is now echoing throughout the Montenegrin politics of today. It has obfuscated any type of ideational goals, ideologies, political programmes, platforms in guiding principles - just to give you an example.

You have parties in Montenegro that formally, officially are say socialists in their name, being in the government or in the opposition. They have a socialist name, yet they talk about the lack of governmental intervention, the lack of, or the need to – for instance - reduce taxes which is unusual for a socialist platform. Or you have conservative parties that are actually against, for instance, private ownership and want to nationalise more

property. You have some posturing about the ideology, just for the sake of resemblance, but the real cleavages remain the same. So 0 sum activism is very much alive in today's electoral campaign; it is difficult for me to explain to my foreign colleagues how can someone enter into a political competition and be so adamantly inclined to say that they are promising unknown compromising attitude in the future. That is what hampers the Montenegrin political story. How can the essence of political behaviour be only a 0-sum approach? That is the biggest puzzle. The true legacy of compromise in Montenegro - but I think also throughout the Western Balkans - can be mirrored in linguistics: in Montenegrin, in Serbian I think also in Croatian, I think also in Bosnian we do not have a word that can translate the Anglo-Saxon term of bipartisanship. You know, in the United States one of the biggest achievements in political life is when a decision is bipartisan. Parties are run on campaigns on their ability to reach out as they say across the aisle. You do not have that type of attitude at least for now in Montenegro. It is more a kind of a revolutionary drive, a more insurrectionist drive. We are going to beat and defeat and ostracize anyone else. Montenegro as such will remain entrenched in old cleavages, so there is nothing unusual about the fact that the cleavages persist, allowing them to overlap, intersect, consolidate and socialise new generations to believe that the only way in politics in Montenegro should be done by embracing a 0 sum approach - us versus them. This attitude makes Montenegro very vulnerable to external pressures, interested third parties that want to use Montenegro as a test case for proxy battleground can easily wager one of the two sides. And with a steady supply of logistics, finances, intelligence allow Montenegro to remain stuck in discourses that have been troubling generations before.

Political polarisation in Montenegro is a domestic phenomenon - the root causes are domestic, but extent in shape that we are

observing today on a contemporary level is unequivocally fostered from the outside. The media landscape in the small country such as Montenegro is inevitably relying on the new sources from abroad, for instance. So we can now observe an aggressive campaign from outside actors feeding pre-packaged information that frame the political discourses in a way that caters to the needs and the interests of their specific foreign powers. Civil sector for instance, as vibrant as it is, and I am very happy to know how vibrant the NGO sector is in Montenegro, still heavily relies on external support. And it is clearly as such in their interest to maintain a picture, a framework in which Montenegro is still depicted as a society in perpetual crisis. Notwithstanding the validity of those claims, I am not disputing them, the real problem emerges when civil society becomes partisan and biased in everyday party politics. So when the lines between party politics and civic engagement become very obfuscated that is what reduces the effectiveness of civil society as a control factor. These lessons are still being learned even in the most advanced societies around the globe. I generally hope that Montenegro will find a formula that can help the country overcoming these birthing pains. It is a young system, it is a system that needs time, it is a system that is going to change and only by embracing these differences, by addressing the differences, discussing the differences and not shoving them under the rug, will this change emerge. I will leave it at that, and I would gladly go into details of each one of these processes as we move forward in our discussion.

2. Bipartisanship and finding common grounds and solutions

I was inspired, as you can imagine, by the situation in the United States - there has been a deep regression of what is the political culture in the United States over the past four years when it comes to the value of partisanship. But it did not start with Trump,

it started with Bush, then it kind of escalated with Obama and it culminated now with Trump. So we are seeing the effects how a galvanizing, polarising, mobilising narrative can be detrimental to the social fabric, even in the most developed or most advanced democracies as the United States. So we should not be surprised that Montenegro is still struggling with the fact that compromise is a dirty word. Compromise is a bad word for many politicians, because it may depict them as weak, it may depict them as their only ability is the yield to the pressure's off the others and that the others are going to win. In politics you need to become confident in the acts of the other. And if you do not have confidence in what the other side is going to do, you are going to maintain a very apprehensive stand on their politics, on their plans, on their platforms and as such there is not going to be a lot of space for manoeuvring, for compromise.

The first minimal step, if I can put it this way, the minimal step to compromise in Montenegro and Montenegro can be an example for the rest of Southeast Europe, but I think it is also fair to call it Western Balkans - because when we talk about Southeast Europe we can also include other parts that are not Balkanised as much. We can see that as a win-win mentality, is actually portrayed as a lose-lose mentality. At least they lost as much as we did! So it is fair. Fairness is kind of in the shared loss. Not in the shared gain; I cannot live with the gain of the other. I cannot live of giving them giving them any meaningful victory. But they lost I lost so we are OK. Now the point about that in Montenegro is that in my opinion as detrimental as it may sound, that is a necessary step for a society like Montenegro to go through. In Montenegro you have the media landscape, you have the party landscape and you also have the civil society landscape that still operates along those lines. And I am talking about three pillars of society that should be acting differently, then every day routine politics. They should be outside of the... – well not party politics as much, but at least the

media and the civil society - but the galvanizing, mobilising effect is exactly what Mr. Milić was saying - it is necessary to rally the votes and to maintain the hold of power. Not decision-making power but to hold the power, to maintain relevance, to maintain visibility. So, the more you can galvanize the population around an idea that they find salient, that they perceive existential, that they perceive urgent, the easier it is going to be to them to use that. Not many people understand economics and whenever you hear anyone talking about economics in Montenegro it is predominantly a populist demagoguery. It is superficial, it doesn't go into details, it does not go into critical thinking about economic policies - it is really just kind of highlights of certain types of numbers that people cannot check that easily.

So, what we are seeing right now is that anything is fair gain in political discourse in Montenegro. And politics in Montenegro - and I agree with the fact that that there is a strong fatigue with politics in Montenegro - Politics has become dull. They are predictable. You know what to expect, you know who is going to be where, you know who is willing to make a pact with whom, you know how the coalitions are going to be and there is a very slim margin of undecided voters that everyone is trying to kind of capitalise on. And for a small country that is really a small margin of people. As dull as politic has become, I think that for the first time we have elections that are not so dull. And they are not dull, because some issues have finally started to crystallise and my hope is that if Montenegro goes out from this electoral cycle in a way that can address these issues that had been shoved under the rug for a long period of time and that have been only remotely addressed in very vague terms - and I am talking about the question of the status of the church, I am talking about any type of religious/institutional position of the Serb-orthodox church in Montenegro, which has been bothering the political landscape for decades in Montenegro. This is what has been galvanizing the

population. It was an easy capital for the political parties. So if we can crystallise that discourse, if we can kind of shape what is really a possibility and what is not a possibility and what is right and what is wrong if that is what people are striving for.

That is no longer going to be part of the discussion, even in the background, in future electoral cycles. So we need to encourage Montenegro to kind of face itself in the mirror, address the difficult questions. The question of the church is also a question for any country that has been going through the period of social formation. For advance societies like Germany or France or the United Kingdom this happened in the 19th century. Montenegro unfortunately leaped from the 19th century to the 21st century, so it kind of has to address questions that some societies have addressed during the second industrial revolution. Now Montenegro is addressing those questions and at the same time addressing the 4th industrial revolution. It is not an easy task for a small and fragile system, but it has to be done. And I am really not saying that it has to be done in a way that is aggressive, in a way that is unilateral, imposing, but there needs to be an open discourse. In my opinion for the first time we have elections that are openly bringing up everything to surface. We can understand what the political parties think about the future of Montenegro, we can think about certain types of social values. When I am talking about social values I am talking about the role of the minorities, and I am not talking only about national minorities, I am talking about sexual minorities, I am talking about occupational minorities, I am talking about regional minorities, I am talking about all forms of minorities. I am talking about what else can they offer. For the first time in Montenegro we have someone that is openly advocating conspiracy theories in political landscape.

That is how sterile political discourse has become. In order to find something new they want to QAnon - I don't know if you familiar what QAnon is – it is pseudoterrorist group in the United States that has been known supporting Trump, but we have political parties that are now embracing that type of discourse. You know, all of the residue for decades that have been compiling on the political landscape is now coming up to the surface and my hope is that passed this electoral cycle is not a doomsday electoral cycle, it is not to end of the world electoral cycle, but it is an electoral cycle, because it might crystallise what the future for Montenegro is going to look like. When you talk about the geopolitical positioning of Montenegro, when you talk about the regional positioning of Montenegro, when you talk about the relations between Montenegro and its neighbours, when you talk about internal questions - and let me be very specific what I mean about internal questions. We need to crystallise once and for all what the parties really think when they say that Montenegro is a multi-ethnic society. Do they say that Montenegro is a , so that it really does not matter what your nationality is, or is it that Montenegro needs to be a country of multiple ethnicities? Now for the first time you actually have a very open discussion about the possibility of creating certain types of platforms around the idea of the Bosnian scenario in Montenegro.

Only when people know what is being offered on a political level they will make a calculated choice. Otherwise they will only echo their choices from the past. I think that is why I mean we need an open debate. And that is only what is going to allow for this bipartisanship. Parties need to understand that having something in common does not mean that you are the same. So if you share something on an economic platform, but you do not share it for instance on a geostrategic platform, that does not mean there you should have compromise on economic platforms. Or vice versa. But this needs to be done only once these difficult issues in

Montenegro are addressed at least kind of out in the open and then the country can go forward.

3. Conclusion

In a small country media is relying on news sources from outside. So the biggest problem as such in Montenegro is not that they have to rely on these sources, it is the inability to actually critically absorb that type of information from the media outlet. We are talking about a deep problem with media literacy among the journalists and among the media outlets in general, and among the consumers, those ones that read the media reports, they get really confused by the reporting. The idea behind the message is never clear, the reasons why this message has been placed in a way it has been placed is not clear. And to complicated things and this is what I said about the 4th industrial revolution that Montenegro is facing right now most of the information comes from social networks. It comes from unregulated spaces. We can talk about 'Glasjavnosti' and we can talk about all of the tabloids from Serbia, but much of the noise and confusion actually stems from trolling the Internet that has a very vulgar, inappropriate, conspiracy thinking mindset projected onto the population in Montenegro. And even more - because it is a small country - and even more easily you can use mobile phones to send messages with these types of key points. Someone was talking very recently about the pandemic and someone said there is an infodemic - and I agree that there is an infodemic and in Montenegro, if I may be a little bit creative, with the way things have been unfolding through the pandemic times, you could see in Montenegro on daily basis people being bombarded with very dubious information through Viber. And the text was almost perfect, but you could see that it was written by a machine, you could see that someone that was not from the country was writing it. That was an exercise of how far artificial intelligence can go in creating

continued news loop for the people in the country. So Montenegro can be seen as a lab rat for these type of trials. Not just for Montenegro, but for the region in general, because of the linguistic compatibility. Why is there a problem when it comes to tabloids working from Serbia, the only thing that we need to suggest or advice anyone from outside is not to treat Montenegro as their internal problem. This is as far as it can go. Right now in the media reporting in Serbia you can actually see that Montenegro is treated as a domestic issue. I think that this is what confuses the audiences a lot. So someone, somewhere needs to start addressing this elephant in the room when it comes to Serbia reporting about Montenegro. I think pieces will fall in the place, but it might be too late, because of the way that social networks and other media outlets are operating right now.

Holger Haibach

Thank you very much Dr Vuković. What you said about embracing differences and being adamant and non-compromising reminds me also of other electoral campaigns going on around the globe not only in Montenegro right now. But this is something else for another forum to be discussed. However, thank you very much for your very interesting remarks putting into a perspective what is actually going on from the standpoint of what conflicts actually are existing on the ground and what is hindering the process and the progress of the country.

For a more inside view I would like to welcome Mr. Srđan Milić, member of the Parliament of Montenegro. He may give us his view, what he is looking at from the inside of the country and where he is seeing his country going forward of not going forward in the process of becoming more integrated into Europe, more democratic, making more progress on many levels. Mr. Milić, please.

Srđan Milić

1. Introduction

Western Balkans are a part of South-East Europe. They can't be West from Balkans, because I'm not so sure that in the Konrad Adenauer Foundation or anywhere else you can find South Balkans or East Balkans. And that is not only a rhetorical question, it is a real question. Geographically we belong to Europe, but it seems that the political elite in this region does not like to be part of the European Union. And when I say political elite, I think both sides - position and opposition. And the question is why. Why are we doing it this way? Why don't we change something? Why do we have such a system of values, that exists in these countries? Why do we have all the same remarks when we speak about countries in the region? I think there is no problem in the linguistic way, because our leaders can understand each other very well, but the problem is that they have their common goals. And unfortunately, these common goals are not close to the European goals at all. The system of values that represent the European Union. Because to be part of the European Union, if you allow me, is your decision.

That is the decision of the countries that are already in the European Union. But our main goal is how to do this in a way that link standards, human rights - everything together, to be better. According to the Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights we have three pillars. One is the right to democratic governance. And that is also my question: Don't we have here the right to democratic governance or the right to intellectual freedom? Or the right to moral equality? And that is something that I proposed already 12 years ago. On the 18th of September 2008 we created here in

Montenegro the National Council for European Integration and I was the first president of this Council. And we proposed, at that time, so called six C's. The first C was communication. Dialogue is not everything, but without a dialogue, everything is nothing. And cooperation, coordination, collaboration, consensus, and as Mr. Vuković said, first of all compromise.

The compromise with a common aim how to make our lives better. Unfortunately, in our region we are repeating our lessons and our lessons began in the 1990s, I think Dr Gordan knows that better than me, when we had here the opportunity to become a member of the European Union. And then we started to deal our own jobs. But unfortunately, that finished in the way as it did and the new generation of politicians in our region has to change that. We can help them and the situation in Montenegro now is worse than it has been in 2008 when we created this National Council of European Integration. Yes, we opened all the chapters but at the same time we did not close any of the chapters. That is our second problem. Then we speak about this commitment to all these three pillars that is not only support, but it requires first of all the commitment to democracy. And when the three pillars of democracy are falling apart then we have problems. This is a problem that we are trying to find a way to change the system of values that exist in Montenegro and also in the region.

2. Paradox in Montenegro

I will speak a little bit about the paradox in Montenegro. If you allow me, from the economic point of view. Here are some figures: in 2008 citizens of Montenegro needed a document to enter in European Union – in Italy it's called 'permesso' or visa. It is a permission to visit or to live in Europe. We had about 8500 inhabitants from Montenegro. In 2018, ten years later we are

having 35.000 inhabitants of Montenegro who were already living in the European Union. In 2012 to 2020 our public debt increased to 120%. At the same time in 2012. it was 1.7 billion euros. In 2020. it is already 3.78 billion euros. In the same period of time the average salary in Montenegro in 2012. was 487 euros, in 2020. 515 euros. And if you allow me – it increased only by 28 euros or 5%. So, 120% increase of the public debt on one side, and on the other side only 5% increase of the average salary in Montenegro. If the average salary had grown as the public debt grew, it should be today in Montenegro 1070 euros. If somebody would ask me: OK, whose responsibility is this, I would say it belongs to the both parts of political society in Montenegro. But it is not the time to ask who is responsible, it is the time to ask what we can do to change it. What can we offer to the people of Montenegro to change this situation? At the same time the growth in GDP in Montenegro, from 2016. to 2020. it was only 4.08% and the growth of public debt from 2016. to 2020 was 10.52%. So, the question is what happened with our money in Montenegro?

If I may point out one sentence, I think the colleagues already said that, here in Montenegro we have some old issues and long-standing problems in our small, but beautiful Montenegro theatre. Our hostilities and confrontation should be replaced by decisive cooperation on the common future project. As such as it should include all parts of the society without prejudices. Our prejudice in Montenegro and the prejudice of the people who are speaking about Montenegro, I think that is the main problem. We have unfortunately high levels of inequality in Montenegro and we need at the same time to provide or to promote social economic and also environmental recovery of the country of Montenegro. We are now approaching this new lesson. The Prime Minister Churchill said 60 - 70 years ago, that we (people that are living in Balkan) are producing here more history than we can eat. Using this sentence, we can also describe current

situation in Montenegro. But we were the only country that had difficult time in 1999 which we survived, finding a way to live together. Somebody thinks that is also the heritage of the political elite- but truth is – that is the heritage of the people who are living in Montenegro. If you allow me, and see that I have only one minute more for this introduction, allow me to finish with this: there is everything here but, please, we have to do something what I said in that period of time, we don't need more barriers, because we have all barriers here. We don't need to see who the traitor is, and who is the patriot. We want to see somebody else; we want to see who will deal with our problems. Montenegro is a rich country, it is a nice country, it is the most beautiful country from my point of view. We can become the importer and exporter of the stability for all the region as a small country. That is, I think, a common task for the entire new generation of politicians. Here in Montenegro we need a new generation of politicians who will not interfere in the question of the referendum.

3. Economic Questions

As close as we are to the European Union the economic and social question will become more important, and the narrative of the campaign is unfortunately contrary. That is our problem. Nobody speaks what he will do. They just want to point out what are our differences and how we are different from the others. As an example, from Croatia, I said that for several times, all the representatives of the political minorities in Montenegro have to be in all governments in Montenegro. That is the only way how we will protect in some way their rights. But let me speak about the economic questions. As you know we are so focused on tourism here in Montenegro; and unfortunately, with the pandemic we have got a lot of problems. We were pronounced as the first Corona free country, and I asked and plead not to do so. The problem is - we want to be the first in something and we are

not protecting our economy, which is the most important thing. We have now this affair with a state company from Malta – Enemalta - it is connected with the murder of Dafne Karuana Galicia, a journalist from Malta and this will come after these elections. It seems that many people from both sides - I finished this year my MP work and I will not participate in the elections, so I can speak in some other way - I think that everyone is using these elections as a laundry room for their own political mistakes. And after the elections – we have a simple bureaucracy approach: but we obtained that and that figures of the votes - and that is wrong that is our main problem in Montenegro. Our main problem is that we did not sit around the table together and said as follows:

Is the European integration our strategic goal? Yes!

What does European integration mean? European integration means that you will be in 2025 not a part of the European Union, but you will have 75% of the average salary in the European Union here in Montenegro. And when you see this coefficient named Gini in Montenegro, it is such a big difference between the rich and the poor. That is to our main problem. I think that many people can speak a lot about our history, but only a small number of people can speak about the future, because everyone – I proposed for the electoral law – that first of all in Southeast Europe we have to adopt a law that you could be for only two mandates a member of the Parliament. Because the best job in Southeast Europe is to be a member of the Parliament, regardless if you are part of the majority, or part of the minority. You are sitting there, you are convinced to do an excellent job, but your country is not going so well.

4. Conclusion

My colleague in the Parliament from my group is madam Pavićević, she is the sister of Duško Jovanović, the chief editor daily newspaper DAN who was killed in 2004. And unfortunately, 16 years later we still do not know who killed the chief editor of one newspaper. From the other side you know that there is no black-and-white, not in Germany, not in Croatia, not in Montenegro. So we need to ask a question – Is there a “clear path” that leads (deserve) to the answer who needs whose help? I was the man who was attacked from this newspaper from Serbia, from Russia, from other sides and I belong to the bad guys, because I voted for ‘no’ at the referendum in 2006. That is the main problem! So, just to make it clear, the main problem is this attitude of the people in government who wants to keep situation like it is now. Situation with divisions in all aspects.

And another question is who is helping who? If Vučić needs help; if Vučić needs something to create foreign enemy, he will attack Đukanović. But several times, they were (Đukanović and Vučić) together to discuss and agree about their private interest, without any problem or misunderstandings. Unfortunately - and I shall finish within this minute - after all these periods of time I think that we opened a lot of questions in Montenegro; also, thanks to the media – mostly of them are independent. But still remains something, that the reason for opening these questions isn't because we want to resolve that – we opened these questions to make trouble to the government or the opposition. And that is our main problem.

Holger Haibach

Thank you very much Mr. Milić for your insight I think this was a very important contribution. I would just like to make two comments on what to have said. First of all the framing the countries of the West Balkan 6 - actually within the Konrad

Adenauer foundation we are in the South East Europe department. So we already understood that there is obviously the need to rethink this topic. We are just using the term because it is the one that has been introduced and is used all around the globe. And secondly what is more important to me - you have been talking about the necessity of not putting up other barriers and trying to find the people who can make the wonderful country that you live in thrive and go along. Norbert Beckman, who has been overseeing our activities for quite some time, has taken us one and a half year ago for a KAS-directors conference to Montenegro. And we could convince ourselves of the beauty and the wonderful landscape and everything that is nice about Montenegro. I would just like to go back to Norbert and perhaps ask him the following: If you were in the shoes of the European Commission, since you are overseeing our activities in four different countries, so, if you were an advisor to the European Commission, and after ask that question I will hand over to Gordan. But now the question: What would your advice be?

Norbert Beckmann

Thank you Holger. It is quite simple. As I already mentioned - it is not a lack of laws, it is not a lack of political debates and so on, it is a lack of implementation. That is the question about political culture. That is the typical scenery for transformation states. Siniša had focused on it and here we have really a big, big challenge also in Montenegro how to develop a culture of political compromise and of debate. Not only to have it in black-and-white, in enemies and friends. So, in a political culture where we can really approach the European Union. As I said, it is not a lack of laws, or something else, or institutions, it is a lack of political culture and of implementation as it existed. And we as the European Union have to put the finger on this one and say: OK, you will join the European Union you have analysed all the values

of the NATO membership and you fulfil your obligations there, please put it also on the table every day in your political life. In my analysis, and that is the last sentence to this question, I think Montenegro has really great chances. It is a little bit different to other countries in Southeast Europe. So, we have here really two strong political blocks and we see now in the polls and also in the Parliament where DPS has not an all majority, that there is an opportunity for political congruence and discussion and for a choice for the people. And it is really, really necessary that people know for what they can vote and to use this chance and I see also a little bit of tiredness that people are not any longer interested in politics and that is difficult and dangerous in this process.

Holger Haibach

Thank you very much Norbert. Now I would like to hand over to Gordan, maybe he has some questions to the other participants.

Gordan Akrap

Thank you! I have to say that I was very pleased when I heard our guests and colleagues from Montenegro and the United States, because the main point of what we are trying to do here is – as you said - this is not Europe and West Balkan 6, it is the European Union with the West Balkan 6 countries. We do not treat them as someone else, as it is part of Europe, it is in the core of Europe. As we said, for example Greece is the cradle of the European and the world civilization. It is a region where everything began. As I said, I am very glad that all our colleagues were giving a point to the necessity to find a compromise about the key points of the future of Montenegro. Because the future of Montenegro is going to be developed in a positive or negative way, and it will influence all of us, not just Montenegro. I see Montenegro as a state that can help, because of the significant number of Serbs living in

Montenegro, and Kosovo Albanians who live in Montenegro, as a possible key, profiling a long lasting solution for the Serbian and Albanian problem concerning Kosovo. And there is a significant number of Bosnians living there in Montenegro. This is an area that is also close to Sandžak. That might be a key point that we help together with Croatia to stabilise Bosnia and Herzegovina in order to complete this region. I understand my colleague Milić when he said this about the West Balkan 6 countries using that name. We did not like it in Croatia also, but we are lucky that we are now a member of the European Union. I remember in 2000 when we heard that Croatia is also a West Balkan 6 country, we did not like it. So we share the same opinion. But what I am surprised with, when I was monitoring what was going on during the election process in Montenegro, is the fact that the colleague Milić mentioned, from the economic point of view it did not get that much publicity. I would like to ask Mr. Milić and Mr Vuković, if possible, what do they think, why this did not happen? Why were other questions raised by the media?

Holger Haibach

May I just add one more question? Perhaps we can raise two questions together, as I think they go together. Mr Vuković you very much underlined the fact that one of the reasons why there are still conflicts - and I think that does not go only for Montenegro but it also goes for other countries in the region – is the fact that there is no culture of what you call partisanship , which has been prevailing in the United States for quite a long time and hopefully it will be privileging again in future. How do you think or what do you suggest what would be your way forward to overcome those obstacles in the way to get the economy going, get to the political compromises under way and all those things.

Siniša Vuković

I would like Mr. Milić to start with the economic questions then I can combine the two if that is possible.

Srđan Milić

OK, I think I can answer the question in this way: as close as we are to the European Union the economic and social question will become more important, and the narrative of the campaign is unfortunately contrary. That is our problem. Nobody speaks what he will do. They just want to point out what are our differences and how we are different from the others. As an example from Croatia I said for several times that all the representatives of the political minorities in Montenegro have to be in all governments in Montenegro. That is the only way how we will protect in some way their rights. But let me speak about the economic questions. As you know we are so focused on tourism here in Montenegro; and unfortunately with the pandemic we have a lot of problems. We were pronounced as the first Corona free country, and I asked and plead not to do so. The problem is - we want to be the first in something and we are not protecting our economy, what is the most important thing. We have now this affair with a state company from Malta – Enemalta - it is connected with the murder of Dafne Karuana Galicia, a journalist from Malta and this will come after these elections. It seems that many people from both sides - I finished this year my MP work and I will not participate in the elections, so I can speak in some other way - I think that everyone is using these elections as a laundry room for their own political mistakes. And after the elections - but we obtained that and that figures of the votes and that is wrong that is our main problem in Montenegro.

Our main problem is that we did not sit around the table together and said as follows: Is the European integration our strategic goal? Yes! What does European integration mean? European integration means that you will be in 2025 not a part of the European Union, but you will have 75% of the average salary in the European Union here in Montenegro. And when you see this coefficient in Montenegro, it is such a big difference between the rich and the poor. That is to our main problem. I think that many people can speak a lot about our history, but only a small number of people can speak about the future, because everyone – I proposed for the electoral law – that first of all in Southeast Europe we have to adopt a law that you could be for only two mandates a member of the Parliament. Because the best job in Southeast Europe is to be a member of the Parliament, regardless if you are part of the majority, or part of the minority. You are sitting there, you are convinced to do an excellent job, but your country is not going so well. Sorry for the things I said finally.

Holger Haibach

This is an open discussion and everybody has its own opinion. I can totally understand what you are saying, especially with regards to the problem that a country, as far as the economy goes, is very much relying on one sector only. I read up the figures when I was preparing. I think Montenegro is depending on 21% of the economy or the GDP is created by tourism, and it is the same actually here in Croatia. This is why the countries which are so much depending on tourism are suffering so much more from the coronavirus and all the consequences that it has. To get more diverse, to be more productive in other areas there should be something that could keep us going forward, not only in Montenegro, but in all the countries of the region. And with that I would like to go back to doctor Vuković, perhaps he could give us some ideas on how bipartisanship and finding common

grounds and solutions might help us in getting not only politics going better but also economy going better.

Siniša Vuković

Thank you for that question, thank you for picking that up. I was inspired, as you can imagine, by the situation in the United States - there has been a deep regression of what is the political culture in the United States over the past four years when it comes to the value of partisanship. But it did not start with Trump, it started with Bush, then it kind of escalated with Obama and it culminated now with Trump. So we are seeing the effects how a galvanizing, polarising, mobilising narrative can be detrimental to the social fabric, even in the most developed or most advanced democracies as the United States. So we should not be surprised that Montenegro is still struggling with the fact that compromise is a dirty word. Compromise is a bad word for many politicians, because it may depict them as weak, it may depict them as their only ability is the yield to the pressure's off the others and that the others are going to win. In politics you need to become confident in the acts of the other. And if you do not have confidence in what the other side is going to do, you are going to maintain a very apprehensive stand on their politics, on their plans, on their platforms and as such there is not going to be a lot of space for manoeuvring, for compromise.

The first minimal step, if I can put it this way, the minimal step to compromise in Montenegro and Montenegro can be an example for the rest of Southeast Europe, but I think it is also fair to call it Western Balkans - because when we talk about Southeast Europe we can also include other parts that are not Balkanised as much. We can see that as a win-win mentality, is actually portrayed as a lose-lose mentality. At least they lost as much as we did! So it is fair. Fairness is kind of in the shared loss. Not in the shared gain; I cannot live with the gain of the other. I cannot live of giving them

giving them any meaningful victory. But they lost I lost so we are OK. Now the point about that in Montenegro is that in my opinion as detrimental as it may sound, that is a necessary step for a society like Montenegro to go through. In Montenegro you have the media landscape, you have the party landscape and you also have the civil society landscape that still operates along those lines. And I am talking about three pillars of society that should be acting differently, than every day routine politics. They should be outside of the... – well not party politics as much, but at least the media and the civil society - but the galvanizing, mobilising effect is exactly what Mr. Milić was saying - it is necessary to rally the votes and to maintain the hold of power.

Not decision making power but to hold the power, to maintain relevance, to maintain visibility. So the more you can galvanize the population around an idea that they find salient, that they perceive existential, that they perceive urgent, the easier it is going to be to them to use that. Not many people understand economics and whenever you hear anyone talking about economics in Montenegro it is predominantly a populist demagoguery. It is superficial, it doesn't go into details, it does not go into critical thinking about economic policies - it is really just kind of highlights of certain types of numbers that people cannot check that easily. So what we are seeing right now is that anything is fair gain in political discourse in Montenegro. And politics in Montenegro - and I agree with the fact that that there is a strong fatigue with politics in Montenegro - Politics has become dull. They are predictable. You know what to expect, you know who is going to be where, you know who is willing to make a pact with whom, you know how the coalitions are going to be and there is a very slim margin of undecided voters that everyone is trying to kind of capitalise on. And for a small country that is really a small margin of people. As dull as politic has become, I think that for the first time we have elections that are not so dull. And they are not

dull, because some issues have finally started to crystallise and my hope is that if Montenegro goes out from this electoral cycle in a way that can address these issues that had been shoved under the rug for a long period of time and that have been only remotely addressed in very vague terms - and I am talking about the question of the status of the church, I am talking about any type of religious/institutional position of the Serb-orthodox church in Montenegro, which has been bothering the political landscape for decades in Montenegro.

This is what has been galvanizing the population. It was an easy capital for the political parties. So if we can crystallise that discourse, if we can kind of shape what is really a possibility and what is not a possibility and what is right and what is wrong if that is what people are striving for. That is no longer going to be part of the discussion, even in the background, in future electoral cycles. So we need to encourage Montenegro to kind of face itself in the mirror, address the difficult questions. The question of the church is also a question for any country that has been going through the period of social formation. For advance societies like Germany or France or the United Kingdom this happened in the 19th century. Montenegro unfortunately leaped from the 19th century to the 21st century, so it kind of has to address questions that some societies have addressed during the second industrial revolution.

Now Montenegro is addressing those questions and at the same time addressing the 4th industrial revolution. It is not an easy task for a small and fragile system, but it has to be done. And I am really not saying that it has to be done in a way that is aggressive, in a way that is unilateral, imposing, but there needs to be an open discourse. In my opinion for the first time we have elections that are openly bringing up everything to surface. We can understand what the political parties think about the future of Montenegro,

we can think about certain types of social values. When I am talking about social values I am talking about the role of the minorities, and I am not talking only about national minorities, I am talking about sexual minorities, I am talking about occupational minorities, I am talking about regional minorities, I am talking about all forms of minorities. I am talking about what else they can offer. For the first time in Montenegro we have someone that is openly advocating conspiracy theories in political landscape. That is how sterile political discourse has become. In order to find something new they want to QAnon - I don't know if you familiar what QAnon is – it is pseudo-terrorist group in the United States that has been know supporting Trump, but we have political parties that are now embracing that type of discourse. You know, all of the residue for decades that have been compiling on the political landscape is now coming up to the surface and my hope is that passed this electoral cycle is not a doomsday electoral cycle, it is not to end of the world electoral cycle, but it is an electoral cycle, because it might crystallise what the future for Montenegro is going to look like.

When you talk about the geopolitical positioning of Montenegro, when you talk about the regional positioning of Montenegro, when you talk about the relations between Montenegro and its neighbours, when you talk about internal questions - and let me be very specific what I mean about internal questions. We need to crystallise once and for all what the parties really think when they say that Montenegro is a multi-ethnic society. Do they say that Montenegro is a, so that it really does not matter what your nationality is, or is it that Montenegro needs to be a country of multiple ethnicities? Now for the first time you actually have a very open discussion about the possibility of creating certain types of platforms around the idea of the Bosnian scenario in Montenegro. Only when people know what is being offered on a political level they will make a calculated choice. Otherwise they

will only echo their choices from the past. I think that is why I mean we need an open debate. And that is only what is going to allow for this bipartisanship. Parties need to understand that having something in common does not mean that you are the same. So if you share something on an economic platform, but you do not share it for instance on a geostrategic platform, that does not mean there you should have compromise on economic platforms. Or vice versa. But this needs to be done only once these difficult issues in Montenegro are addressed at least kind of out in the open and then the country can go forward.

Holger Haibach

Thank you very much. I feel a little bit triggered to follow up on your QAnon remark. It reminds me of a big public protest that was to be organised in Berlin and was to take place this Sunday to come. The organisers actually asked their participants, when they were close to 100 kilometres to Berlin, not only to switch their mobiles off, but to pack them in aluminium foil so the government could not trace them down any more. This is where we got and unfortunately, as far as I can see, the consensus that has been carrying democracies all around the world is more in danger than it is actually thriving. So I think you are touching a very important point. But I think Gordan has a question.

Gordan Akrap

Yes, this is a continuation of my first questions – than you both for your answers. I think there is something behind that we did not touch directly upon, because all those messages that we are communicating now between us, need to - as the college Vuković said - galvanise the people, the voters. But between us, and between politicians and the population there is the media. And now when we are analysing the media scene in Montenegro it

becomes obvious that it is very fragile. And it is under strong influence from Serbia and from Russia. For example today has happened something: Glas javnosti from Serbia published an article that caused a lot of problems and disturbances inside the political sphere of Montenegro. I would like to ask both of you for a comment and Norbert from Belgrade, if it is possible: this influence from the pro-Serbian and pro-Russian media in the electoral campaign in Montenegro - how do you see that? Is it necessary to change that in a way that that the media scene can be really free or can we say that they are free now? My personal opinion is that there is negative influence by the media from this pro-Serbian and pro-Russian media from Serbia.

Holger Haibach

If I may suggest, since we are already progressing in in time – let us make this the wrap-up session. I would suggest that we start with Dr Vuković who is already on our screen and then we switch to Mr. Milić and ask Norbert to wrap the whole thing up.

Siniša Vuković

I will try to be brief. There is nothing unusual about the factors as Dr Akrap mentioned. In a small country media is relying on news sources from outside. So the biggest problem as such in Montenegro is not that they have to rely on these sources, it is the inability to actually critically absorb that type of information from the media outlet. We are talking about a deep problem with media literacy among the journalists and among the media outlets in general, and a such the consumers, those ones that read the media reports, they get really confused by the reporting. The idea behind the message is never clear, the reasons why this

message has been placed in a way it has been placed is not clear. And to complicated things and this is what I said about the 4th industrial revolution that Montenegro is facing right now most of the information comes from social networks. It comes from unregulated spaces. We can talk about 'Glas javnosti' and we can talk about all of the tabloids from Serbia, but much of the noise and confusion actually stems from trolling the Internet that has a very vulgar, inappropriate, conspiracy thinking mindset projected onto the population in Montenegro. And even more - because it is a small country - and even more easily you can use mobile phones to send messages with these types of key points. Someone was talking very recently about the pandemic and someone said there is an infodemic - and I agree that there is an infodemic and in Montenegro, if I may be a little bit creative, with the way things have been unfolding through the pandemic times, you could see in Montenegro on daily basis people being bombarded with very dubious information through Viber. And the text was almost perfect, but you could see that it was written by a machine, you could see that someone that was not from the country was writing it.

That was an exercise of how far artificial intelligence can go in creating continued news loop for the people in the country. So Montenegro can be seen as a lab rat for these type of trials. Not just for Montenegro, but for the region in general, because of the linguistic compatibility. Why is there a problem when it comes to tabloids working from Serbia, the only thing that we need to suggest or advice anyone from outside is not to treat Montenegro as their internal problem. This is as far as it can go. Right now in the media reporting in Serbia you can actually see that Montenegro is treated as a domestic issue. I think that this is what confuses the audiences a lot. So someone, somewhere needs to start addressing this elephant in the room when it comes to Serbia reporting about Montenegro. I think pieces will fall in the place,

but it might be too late, because of the way that social networks and other media outlets are operating right now.

Holger Haibach

Thank you very much Dr Vuković. I think you touched a very important point which is the importance of social networks nowadays and the influence that it can have on elections not only in Montenegro, or in Southeast Europe, all over the world actually. We read a lot of reports about that, and we have seen that in the 2017 German elections. Thank God it was not that important, but I think it is going to be in the 2021 as well. Mr. Milić adding up on what Dr Vuković has said, how do you as a citizen of Montenegro, but also as a politician, who even more relies on information that is correct to make informed decisions, how do you inform yourself, and how do you see the media landscape in your country?

Srđan Milić

I shall try to be brief. My colleague in the Parliament from my group is madam Pavličević, she is the sister of Duško Jovanović, the chief editor who was killed in 2004 or 2005. And unfortunately 15 years later we still do not know who killed the chief editor of one newspaper. From the other side you know that there is no black-and-white, not in Germany, not in Croatia, not in Montenegro. The question is did those particles help or not help the people who voted for government parties, ruling parties or the opposition parties. I was the man who was attacked from this newspaper from Serbia, from Russia, from other sides and I belong to the bad guys, because I voted for 'no' at the referendum

in 2006. That is the main problem! The main problem is how to keep this situation like it was before. And another question is who is helping who? If Vučić needs help, if Vučić needs something to create foreign enemy, he will attack Đukanović. But at the same time, several times they were together to discuss about their private interest. Unfortunately - and I shall finish within this minute - after all these period of time I think that we opened a lot of questions in Montenegro; also thanks to the media, to the independent media. But still remains something that we have not opened this question, because we do not want to resolve that – we opened this question to make trouble to the government or the opposition. And that is our main problem.

Holger Haibach

Thank you very much! You outlined one of the problems - there is a certain level in journalism, but it should be higher and it should be raised. That is something that our regional media programme of the foundation for instance is trying to do. Now I would like to hand over to Norbert, because we started with him and we will end with him. Norbert what do you think, what we as the Foundation can actually do to improve media literacy, not only among journalists, but also among the general population?

Norbert Beckmann

Siniša is totally right with his analysis. I think that it is not that important that we have newspapers, television – that is OK, but if you want to build-up a political opinion, a political movement you need to raise that. There always are debates one point more: it is not only the people whole live in Montenegro, but it is also about Montenegrians who live outside of the country there are a huge number of migrants in the United States, in the Scandinavian countries, in Serbia and so on. And they participate in this debate

very, very deeply. They are not raiding the newspapers in Montenegro. My personal idea is do not overestimate newspapers and television in Montenegro in terms of education - it is much more important what we hear from your own network, where do you discuss this. If you go to certain areas for example you will hear people there talking about whether it is better for Đukanović or it is better for Vučić or whoever and that is the main point for political education.

Coming back to your question - I think that part of the foundations, in this case also the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, with an office in Montenegro, tomorrow I will go to Montenegro, has targets. Our targets is to really sensitize the people in politics, the multipliers, as they say more decent and more open minded to discuss the really important topics for them in Montenegro politics it a different way. And as they find – Siniša thank you for this – it is the absolute opportunity to find compromises, to have a culture of debate and that we have to train with the young generation, we have to train with the journalists, because they are also looking black and white, and they are looking around for enemies of a friends. It is the same story as we have it in politics and also in the civil society. I will not be more critical, but it is as you described it. It is in every pillar of this society. We can create space for open, for political cultural debates and not only inside Montenegro, but also with Croatia, with Hungary, with the States of the European Union, United States and others who have a real heritage of democratic tradition and discussion culture.

Holger Haibach

Thank you very much Norbert. I think you can hear from what Norbert has been saying that this is somebody not speaking from because he has read about politics at universities and they may

have studied it, but somebody who has been really in the job and it goes down in the end to the following: all politics is local and all politics is personal, especially in a very small country like Montenegro where you have such a small population, where it is really important what the neighbour says about the guy who is running for office. With that for the closing remarks I would like to hand over to Gordan.

Before I forget, allow me to say thank very much to our three guests who have given us very good and very deep insights in what needs to be done to manage the course of Montenegro. It goes without saying that we cannot resolve things within one and half hours, otherwise it would have been solved decades ago, but it gave us some food for thought and we are very thankful for your contributions. Gordan, please.

Gordan Akrap

Thank you Holger. I would also like to stress my deepest gratitude to the speakers who have joined us today, because it is a fact that I know a little more about this region and am always trying to use the opportunity to learn more - and that happened today. The reason why and what we were speaking about today shows that Montenegro is important, not just because it is some small country somewhere in the Balkans, this is important for Europe, for the stabilisation of Europe and for the future of Europe, because I do not think that the European Union needs to lead this area without future, without positive development, without things that can support democracy and the way how people can live together, despite the differences they have because of their nationality.

And I am very glad that we saw here that compromise, in order to find a better future for everyone, not just in Montenegro and

around it, is possible to find. I hope that thanks to the fact that we are going to have elections this weekend – we do not now the results yet, of course – but nevertheless, I hope that those who are going to finish the elections as the winners, that they will continue with their European way of Montenegro towards the European integration.

HolgerHaibach

And that ladies and gentlemen closes the third episode of our series EU and the West Balkan 6. Thank you very much for tuning in.

Conference video is available at:

<https://www.kas.de/de/web/kroatien/veranstaltungsberichte/detail/-/content/eu-und-die-westbalkan-staaten-wb6-montenegro-2>